

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

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REP. PHIL PFLUM'S STATEHOUSE REPORT

INDIANAPOLIS – As the first month of the 2005 session of the Indiana General Assembly draws to a close, most of the legislative process is focusing on the actions of committees in both the House and Senate.

The governor has detailed his priorities for action in his State of the State speech. In the weeks to come, lawmakers will take action on bills that outline those priorities, as well as legislation that covers a variety of subjects and issues of interest to House members.

Since this is a long session, we will have time to give many of these ideas a full hearing. House members must complete committee action on the 859 bills and 18 joint resolutions filed in our chamber by February 24.

In the weeks to come, committees will debate and vote on the major issues of this session, including the new biennial state budget, a proposed plan to finance a new stadium for the Indianapolis Colts, economic development measures and daylight-saving time.

We also will have time to discuss other concerns, including a proposed ban on the use of cell phones while a person is driving, changes in the way road funding dollars are distributed in Indiana, and whether the ISTEP test should be moved to the spring.

There has been a steady stream of activity on the House floor. Here are several measures of note that have received approval.

House Joint Resolution 4 provides a constitutional right to hunt and fish. This resolution, which comes in apparent response to a growing anti-hunting movement, provides that people have the right to hunt and fish and harvest game because they are a valued part of our heritage. This amendment would not give hunters and fishermen the right to go on another person's property without permission. They still must comply with all laws and regulations pertaining to guns, hunting and fishing.

If HJR 4 is approved by the Legislature this year, it must be submitted again to the next Indiana General Assembly, either in 2007 or 2008. If it is approved at that time, the voters of Indiana must approve the change in a referendum, probably in 2008, before it will become part of the Indiana Constitution.

While I support this effort, I was disappointed that the House majority voted down a measure that would have amended the Constitution to prevent school corporations from charging fees. If this amendment would have become law, parents would not have to pay for the textbooks their children use at school. This move would save many families hundreds of dollars each year and meet the constitutional requirement of a free public education.

Our latest effort to stop the production and use of the drug methamphetamine (better known as "meth") is found in House Bill 1248, which addresses the rising costs that local units of government are seeing in jailing offenders for these crimes. The bill would allow counties to require people convicted of meth offenses to reimburse the costs of incarceration.

In recent years, the Legislature has passed a number of initiatives aimed at stopping the spread of a drug that causes dangerous side effects and is produced using a number of volatile chemicals that can create potential hazards.

In 2004, we created a statewide task force responsible for developing a long-term strategic action plan to stop the growth of meth. In 2003, lawmakers approved a series of proposals that help police and prosecutors track down people who purchase large amounts of the chemical re-agents used to make the drug, set up a dealer education program to help identify these purchases, and require people convicted of meth-related offenses to help pay for cleaning up sites where they produced the drug.

Other measures on meth are expected to get hearings in the next several weeks. One proposal would place restrictions on access to some of the ingredients used to make the drug, such as pseudoephedrine and ephedrine. Some of these ingredients can be found in cold medications that are commonly available in pharmacies and other stores.

We also continue to work on bills that enhance our economic development efforts. House Bill 1182, which was passed by the House this week, makes the state's Tax Increment Financing (TIF) program permanent. Without action, the program would have gone out of existence at the end of this year.

The TIF program enables local units of government to create special districts in order to attract new economic development. Within these districts, incentives are provided to attract new businesses. Infrastructure improvements such as streets and sewers are completed at little or no cost to those companies located in the districts. Any new tax revenues generated as a result of the new development are used to pay for improvements within the district. They are not used to pay for other entities, such as schools.

While I supported House Bill 1182, I would have liked to have seen House Bill 1182 contain some way for state and local officials to determine the effectiveness of the TIF program. There was an effort to provide some accountability by asking for regular reports that detailed the numbers of jobs created in TIF districts and the impact lost property tax proceeds has on school corporations in those areas. The House majority voted against that proposal.

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This Report can be accessed on the Internet at www.IN.gov/H56